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SUBJECT: CORRUPTION ARTICLE PROVOKES DESTRUCTION OF
NEWSPAPERS AND DEATH THREATS

¶1. (U) On February 28, the "Nouveau Reveil," a newspaper closely affiliated with former President Henri Konan Bedie's PDCI political party, announced it would publish an article on the theft of 4 billion CFA (approximately 8 million USD) by government officials with ties to President Gbagbo. The article, entitled "The ACTI-Warid Communication Affair: How Those Close to Gbagbo Embezzled 4 Billion in State Funds," appeared in the March 4 edition of the newspaper.

¶2. (U) The article alleged that government officials affiliated with President Gbagbo's FPI political party embezzled funds from a government deal with Warid Telecom, a subsidiary of the international Abu Dhabi Group owned by the royal family of Abu Dhabi. According to the article, Eugene Diomande, Chairman of the Board of Comium, one of the cell phone providers in Cote d'Ivoire and reportedly close to the First Lady, facilitated meetings between Warid Telecom and Sylvanus Kla, Director General of the telecoms regulatory body. Kla, who belongs to the FPI and is the president of the General Council of San Pedro, freed up service channels for Warid Telecom so the company could establish itself as the sixth cell phone service provider in Cote d'Ivoire. According to the article, Warid deposited nearly 4 billion CFA in a Spanish bank account in the name of a shell company owned by Diomande.

¶3. (U) Journalists at the "Nouveau Reveil," including editor-in-chief Denis Kah Zion, said they received threatening phone calls during the four days between the newspaper's announcement that it would publish the article and its publication. Some callers allegedly promised large sums of money if the paper shelved the article and others allegedly made death threats. According to the newspaper's distributor, Edipresse, early on the morning of March 4, organized groups of young persons in 3 neighborhoods of Abidjan systematically destroyed thousands of copies of that day's "Nouveau Reveil" edition, which contained the ACTI-Warid article. After shredding the papers, the groups of youth reportedly then hauled away the destroyed papers in garbage bags. The state-owned daily "Fraternite Matin" reported on March 5 that approximately seventy-five percent of the 15,000 "Nouveau Reveil" newspapers of March 4 never made it to readers. No other newspapers were targeted during the destruction.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. Although the National Press Council denounced the vandalism as "reprehensible" and Zion filed a formal complaint against those who destroyed the newspapers, it is highly unlikely that there will be any prosecutions given the lack of capacity of the police and the dysfunctional state of the justice system. End Comment.
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